

# Affective Economies in Danish-Greenlandic Research Relations and Beyond

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## Abstract

Based on a master's thesis, this paper investigates the affective economies present in the author's encounters with Danish-Greenlandic contexts. The article argues that an economy of love based in coloniality is omnipresent in any Danish-Greenlandic encounter. Therefore, these emotions are essential to the understanding of the present and future relationship of Denmark and Greenland. Inspired by Indigenous research ethics and methodologies, the author employs a reflexive research approach to scrutinize her positionality and research process in order to demonstrate what happens when the Danish subject becomes aware of her own colonial complicity. The sources consist of a conversation between the Danish researcher and a Kalaaleq Inuk, as well as autoethnography produced throughout the research process. The article concludes that the Dane circulates protectiveness, entitlement, and shame in the encounter with Greenlandic subjects and that the Dane perceives coloniality as existing through the struggles of the Other, or as structural, but not through the Danish individual. Relevant also to research encounters, the article thus discusses the absence of researcher reflexivity in Danish research about Greenlandic contexts. Concludingly, the study suggests that employing reflexivity and introspection as a methodology is not only apt in understanding Danish affective economies, but also in scrutinizing our own colonial complicity as Danish researchers/students investigating Greenlandic or Danish-Greenlandic contexts.

## Introduction

Although Danes have a relatively small knowledge about Greenland, we know that “we not only own Greenland but also have a moral right to it, because we did so well [colonizing and thus modernizing it]” (Breum 2021, author's translation). A survey from May 2021 shows that

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64% of the Danes wish to maintain the Unity of the Realm. 16% “don’t know” (Breum 2021). It is especially the sense of a Danish national-conservative feeling that is at risk of being infringed should Greenland become independent (Jeppesen 2021). Former Danish Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, has even argued that we ought to maintain the Unity of the Realm because “this relation is a part of our [Danes’] national character” (Breum 2021, author’s translation). It thus makes sense to acknowledge the possibility of an emotional loss, a process of national trauma or grief that Danes will necessarily undergo when Greenland becomes independent in the future (Svendsen 2021). Despite the Danish-Greenlandic relationship being permeated with emotions, these are rarely taken into consideration in geopolitical and economic analyses of Danish-Greenlandic contexts. Based on the author’s MA thesis, this article explores the affective economies (Ahmed 2004) present in the Danish-Greenlandic relationship, more specifically the emotions circulated by the Dane. In the Danish-Greenlandic *set-up* it is primarily the Danes who analyze, reason, and research about Greenlandic *feelings* (Thisted 2018). This article turns the gaze around by employing reflexivity and analytical autoethnography. The aim is to avoid situating myself outside the colonial context as a “neutral” spectator, but to be attentive to how I, as a Dane and researcher, take part in the affective economies, as well as navigate, reflect on, and react upon my colonial complicity. This can hopefully contribute with new insights about the Danish-Greenland relationship, and how affective economies play a role in legitimizing Danish colonial feelings and policies. Moreover, the article seeks to ignite a discussion specifically about researcher positionality and ethics in Danish research about Greenland and Greenlandic people.

### **Methodology: thoughts on reflexivity and autoethnography**

Reflections on research positionalities and epistemic violence have been formative to this research. Since the mid-sixteenth century, Danish colonists, academics, authors, politicians, and journalists have been analyzing, imagining, interpreting and appropriating Greenland into a certain existence through a Danish gaze and to a Danish and international audience (Jacobsen 2019; Thisted 2018). A story that is general to Indigenous communities globally. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Indigenous education scholar, argues that “the term research is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, research, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (Smith 2012[1999]: 30). Researching about, and especially in, Greenland as a Dane (or non-Kalaaleq) is no exception. During the

past year a handful of Greenlandic Inuit decolonization activists have discouraged and refused research inquiries from Danish students and scholars<sup>2</sup>. Activist and filmmaker Aka Hansen wrote the following on her public Instagram-profile:

My personal and lived experience or opinions are no longer freely available for you to use in your strive towards Eurocentric, academic progress. Honestly, I think you should take responsibility and write about Denmark and Denmark's history and Denmark's role and responsibility in Greenland in the past and today (Hansen in Henriksen 2021: 7, author's translation).

In 2013, the Greenlandic Research Council was established to promote Greenlandic research, and in 2019 the annual Greenland Science Week was moved from Denmark to Greenland<sup>3</sup>. Most recently, the research center Nasiffik (Synnestevedt 2021) was established in Greenland to undertake research and disseminate knowledge about Arctic foreign policy and diplomacy from Greenland.<sup>4</sup> In the past few years there has been an increase in conferences and other scholarly work<sup>5</sup> within Danish universities and at Ilisimatusarfik/University of Greenland dealing with collaborative research, researcher positionality and/or decolonization. At this year's Greenland Science Week, two scholars hosted a workshop about research ethics<sup>6</sup>, a group of students from Ilisimatusarfik discussed the decolonization of research, and a talk dealt with the rights of Indigenous peoples and inclusive science, all in relation to Greenland.<sup>7</sup> Research concerning Greenland and Greenlandic ways of life is nonetheless still primarily undertaken by Danes (Graugaard 2020), who rarely address their positionality. Even postcolonial scholars who illuminate and problematize colonial structures and inequalities are mostly, with a Spivakian critique, "masqueraded as absent non-representers" (Bhambra 2014) and often remarkably silent on how they benefit from our colonial legacy. As a response to extractive hit-and-run research and epistemic violence several Indigenous communities have articulated codes of conduct in research. Indigenous scholars have described important aspects of Indigenous methodologies and research ethics, often known as "the four R's": respect, relevance, reciprocity, and relation (Kirkness and Barnhardt 1991; Wilson 2008; Chilisa

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<sup>2</sup> On Instagram: Paninnguaq Lind Jensen [@tunnitit], Paninnguaq Heilmann [@pa.nin.ngu.aq], Aka Hansen [@akahansen]

<sup>3</sup> Greenland Research Council (NIS), 2019, *Annual report*: <https://nis.gl/en/about-us/annual-reports/#>.

<sup>4</sup> However, the majority of Nasiffik is not Inuit

<sup>5</sup> The conference "1721+2021=300"; Greenlandic Science Week Nov 2021; Merrild-Hansen and Ren 2020; Vold 2021.

<sup>6</sup> "Play Nice: Creating an Arctic research handbook", hosted by Kirstine E. Møller and Silke Reeploeg: <https://scienceweek.gl/events-on/play-nice-creating-an-arctic-research-playbook/>.

<sup>7</sup> Talk by Rachael Lorna Johnstone, professor of law at Ilisimatusarfik and at the University of Akureyri.

2020[2011]). To test the relevance of my initial thesis idea<sup>8</sup> I reached out to a handful of people from various Greenlandic communities: two students, an activist, a professor and two youth organizations. The decolonization-organization Nalik argued that “Greenlanders should take responsibility for their own decolonization, and that Danes should do the same in Denmark” (Henriksen 2021: 15). This resonated with the reply of the activist. The two students were open to the initial idea and the rest did not reply. The correspondences took place over the course of six weeks, and I consequently changed the research topic several times. These correspondences were essential to the research because they fostered a reflexive process in which I continuously considered the relevance and reciprocity of my research. One last correspondence resulted in determining the research topic and thus became the main source of the research<sup>9</sup>. This conversation was with the Kalaaleq Inuk artist, Julie Edel Hardenberg<sup>10</sup>, with whom I discussed the Danish past and future with/out Greenland.

I had initially contacted Julie to discuss one of her recent artworks that focuses on indigeneity and decolonization. However, rather than speaking about the artwork the talk turned into a two-hour personal conversation about the (post)colonial relationship between Denmark and Greenland in which Julie challenged me, my position, and my opinions. The conversation can be characterized as an “active and improvisational interview” (Brade 2017: 116) because I had no pre-made questions and because we both shared our thoughts and experiences. It was only after the conversation I realized the analytical potential of my own reflections and emotions, and I therefore chose autoethnography as a method. Besides this conversation, I have included my written and unwritten reflections during the research process from September 2020 to March 2021 as my sources. The reflections stem from conversations with Greenlandic people, my reading and writing process, media coverage about the Danish-Greenlandic relationship, discussions with friends, family, fellow students, teachers and Inuit activists on Instagram, as well as from several Danish produced documentaries, television programs and podcasts about Greenland and the Danish-Greenlandic relationship from the past five years.

Autoethnography is my response to my recognition of the politics of knowledge production and epistemic violence (Spivak 1988; Mignolo 2000; Quijano 2007; Chilisa 2020[2011]) in Danish-Greenlandic contexts. Naja Graugaard (2016, 2020) too employs autoethnography to address the colonial research relations embedded in Danish Greenland research. Being a

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<sup>8</sup> A collaborative decolonization project between Danish and Greenlandic youth.

<sup>9</sup> The conversation took place on Zoom in October 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Julie has consented to be mentioned by her real name. Experience her art at <https://hardenberg.gl/>.

Danish-Inuit researcher, she employs a reflexive method to scrutinize her own positionality, identity, and scholarly activities. She suggests that employing an autoethnographic approach can create a reflexive process that has the potential to challenge the relations of researcher-researched in (post)colonial contexts, as well as to “decolonize” research methodologies and refuse hit-and-run approaches<sup>11</sup>.

For me, autoethnography was also a way to conceptually understand my continuous reflections on positionality and identity as academically relevant rather than self-indulgent. In autoethnography, the author uses self-reflexivity to explore how personal experiences are connected to wider cultural, social or political meanings (Adams et al. 2015: 2). Being reflexive means being aware about one’s own positionality, identity, experiences and presumptions as a researcher and then, importantly, to actively engage with and challenge it accordingly. Since no research is straightforward, I have moreover used autoethnography to illustrate my sense-making processes, my blunders, and ways of coming to terms with my colonial complicity throughout the research. Doing so and showing how one navigates in this complexity can reveal aspects that are vital to the research. Being reflexive and embracing vulnerability and emotions can disrupt social taboos, illuminate privilege and prejudice, encourage dialogue and create individual and social transformations, and thus: “[s]elf-reflection is a catalyst for social change” (Parkes 2015: 11). It is exactly the aim of contributing to and renew scholarly conversation by continuously linking the personal with the general that distinguishes autoethnography from diaries, memoirs and the like (Adams et al. 2015). In this study I employ *analytic autoethnography* (Anderson 2006), through which the researcher-self is visible in the final text. Autoethnography is therefore both methodology and data in this research. Revealing my prejudices, neocolonial blunders and ways of navigating and negotiating these hopefully transcends mere handwringing. The intention is to refuse “the masquerade” by illuminating my own embeddedness in coloniality as a Danish researcher and to ignite a discussion about colonial complicity and epistemic violence in Danish Greenland research.

### **Affective economies**

Whenever Danes and Greenlanders step into any given context, certain emotions rooted in colonialism are always-already present. Therefore, these emotions ought to be considered to

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<sup>11</sup> Approaches where a researcher enter a community, collects data, and leaves. A well-known approach used on Indigenous communities by outsider researchers. Often, the research is neither asked for nor beneficial to the community.

fully grasp current political and cultural discussions about the past, present, and future relationship of Denmark and Greenland (Thisted 2018, 2021). I have sought to identify these emotions by employing autoethnography and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019) within an affect theoretical framework. Sarah Ahmed's (2004) concept *affective economies* is apt in conceptualizing and scrutinizing how emotions shape relations. She argues that emotions are social and cultural practices and therefore something we do rather than something we have. Emotions circulate between bodies and signs, subjects, and objects and exist merely as a means of that circulation. When circulating, the emotion accumulates and thus becomes "sticky" through associations. Consequently, certain emotions stick to certain bodies due to past histories of association. Therefore, emotions do not emerge and reside within the individual but accumulates in the individual's alignment with the collective. In this way, affective economies exist on both an individual and collective level. As an example, the former Danish colonial mantra "To the benefit of Greenland, in the honor of Denmark" has from a Danish perspective made emotions of inadequacy, shame and gratefulness stick to Greenlandic bodies, and emotions of generosity, compassion and responsibility stick to Danish bodies:

The main reason for the Danes' presence in Greenland was...no longer primarily material and economic, but, at least within the understanding of the Danes, primarily of emotional and moral character. From the Danish perspective, gratitude and unconditional loyalty from the Greenlandic people was expected in return, but also very well the return of love, which would result in more love from Denmark along with the expectation of even more loyalty and gratitude – a system which could continue in circulation. Physical objects were merged into this affective economy in the shape of trade goods, services, and vacancies, so that the very act of sending ships, establishing trading stations, as well as hiring people to the services of trade and administration became physical proof of the Danish love (Thisted et al. 2021: 23, author's translation).

The quotation above explains how the specific economy of love has come into being from a Danish perspective. This economy was and continuously is a way for Denmark to legitimize its colonial rule in Greenland. However, Greenland has utilized this economy to strategically negotiate, maneuver and resist colonial structures in the best possible way of all given times (Thisted 2021: 14). This article focuses on the Danish perspective of the affective economies and how the Danish subject navigates within these when power relations are contested by Greenlandic subjects.

### **Love, protectiveness and demands for gratitude**

Through affective economies Danish subjects circulate love towards Greenland, expecting gratitude in return. One transaction of this affective economy is geopolitical protection. Once, Julie was at the Ilulissat Icefjord, Greenland, with a group of Danes. She recalls how a Danish man, visiting Greenland for the first time, began speaking about the importance of the Unity of the Realm:

He got this urge to protect Greenland: “If we did not have this relation, what would happen to Greenland regarding geopolitics?” He almost situated himself in the position of a protector. But Denmark could not do without NATO either. The Dane in him was awakened up here. He arrived as a human, but he left as a Dane (Henriksen 2021: 37).

This anecdote is not unique. Rather, it reflects one of the currently most popularized Danish arguments in favor of the Unity of the Realm. The argument stems from Danish protectionist policies manifested through the civilizing mission discourse generally used by European colonial powers (Jensen 2020a; Sørensen 2007). The argument has been preserved and emphasized by the widely used metaphor of the Danish-Greenlandic relationship as a parental one (Gad 2008; Thisted 2021), as well as through protectionist colonial politics (Petersen 1995; Graugaard 2009) and since through the annual subsidy from Denmark. As a result of their circulation, colonial and protectionist arguments are thus through affective economies disguised and obscured as love and benevolence. Today, any Greenlandic effort to break with Danish dependence is from a Danish perspective often explained as a “teenage rebellion” (Gad 2008). In an editorial of a national Danish broadsheet one could even read an appeal against the Greenlandic longing for independence from “all of us who care about Greenland”.<sup>12</sup> The economy of love often activates Danish feelings of protectionism, entitlement and demands for gratitude which are continuously circulating (Thisted 2018, 2021). Affective economies in the Danish-Greenlandic relationship thereby contribute to disguising or blurring continuing colonial structures.

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<sup>12</sup> *Berlingske*, April 4, 2021: <https://www.berlingske.dk/ledere/groenland-og-danmark-har-mere-end-nogensinde-brug-for-hinanden>.

While listening to Julie's anecdote, I could not relate to the Dane's protectionist urge. However, only minutes later I circulated the exact same emotions of love, or, protectionist feelings. While discussing the future of the Unity of the Realm, I said:

There is also this kind of condescending, paternalistic [Danish argument that] "the USA doesn't want what is best [for Greenland]". Perhaps Denmark really *is* the lesser of two evils... or perhaps it's not. I don't know. (Henriksen 2021: 39)

While at first distancing myself from "paternalistic" Danish arguments about American intentions, I quickly consider the same argument regarding Denmark. After the conversation, I reflected upon the conflict between my belief that Greenlanders alone ought to decide on their economic relations to increase independence from Denmark, and my belief that Denmark will be a "lesser evil" compared with United States, China, or Russia. I pondered if I was being "neocolonial and protectionist or "just" generally nationalistic.. and Eurocentric?" (Henriksen 2021: 39). My emotions and my decolonial and postcolonial training was conflicting. From a postcolonial perspective I am aware that no one colonizes innocently (Césaire, 2000[1950]: 39) and that colonialism is not a spectrum (Lynge 2006). The idea of a "lesser evil" is therefore problematic, also because it presupposes that we know how American, Russian, or Chinese collaboration with Greenland will play out. Finally, for Greenlandic politicians American and Chinese investments are linked to potential independence.<sup>13</sup> What I in my reflections above described as protectionism, nationalism and Eurocentrism can in this context be merged into the concept Nordic exceptionalism, which in the case of Denmark upholds the myth of Denmark as the "gentle colonizer" (Keskinen et al. 2009; Palmberg 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012). Grydehøj et al. (2021) argue that "the China threat discourse" can be perceived as a Danish neocolonial effort to maintain Danish dependency in Greenland. Similar discourses exist in relation to Russia and the United States<sup>14</sup> (Rahbek-Clemmensen and Sørensen 2021). European empires considered colonial rule as a moral duty that was moreover "supported by instrumentalised benevolence and exceptionalism" (Jensen 2020a: 109). It is this exceptionalism and presumed benevolence that continuously legitimizes Danish protectionist policies and arguments towards Greenland, be it against China, Russia, or "racially haughty Englishmen, business minded Americans and stingy Germans." (Bobé 1918: 134–5, author's

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<sup>13</sup> *Sermitsiaq*, August 29, 2021: <https://sermitsiaq.ag/node/215721>; *Altinget*, June 15, 2020:

<https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/195592-groenland-vil-ikke-paa-forhaand-udelukke-kinesiske-investeringer>.

<sup>14</sup> *Altinget*, June 17, 2021: <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/karsten-hoenge-trump-ville-aede-groenland-i-en-stor-mundfuld-nu-vil-biden-skaere-portionen-op-i-mindre-bidder>.



translation). It is noteworthy how I, despite of my support of increased Greenlandic self-determination and independence, as well as my postcolonial training and decolonial intentions, do not manage to liberate myself from the very exceptionalism I am criticizing. In a sense, it manifests in a Danish possessive complex in which Greenland can collaborate with “us or no one”. From a Danish perspective, the ultimate rejection of the economy of love is thus ironically not if Greenland becomes independent, but if they collaborate with other nations than Denmark in doing so.

This resonates with Julie’s statement that the Danish man she met “arrived as a human, but he left as a Dane”. The protectionist emotions that I and the Danish man from Julie’s anecdote circulate are not arbitrary and coincidental. Shaped by asymmetric power relations they have been circulating between Danish and Greenlandic bodies since the beginning of colonialism. These emotions are all part of an economy of love, where coloniality is disguised and misunderstood as benevolence.

### **White tears and shame**

Katrine Kladakis (2012) argues that in Danish media coverage shame sticks to Greenlandic and Danish bodies in different ways. Shame sticks to Greenlandic bodies through descriptions of social anomie. Differently, shame sticks to Danish bodies through association with Greenland’s social anomie and our colonial past. However, because the “white, Danish subject occupies a privileged position as a subject that is not otherwise associated with shame”, as well as a generally privileged position of power in relation to Greenland, Danes can mobilize the shame into something positive (Kladakis 2012: 40). By declaring shame, the Danish subject can mobilize herself into a “well-meaning” individual, and the nation can mobilize itself into a “well-meaning” community (Ahmed 2004: 111). As an example of the latter, Ahmed emphasizes official state apologies. In 2020, the Danish government apologized<sup>15</sup> to 22 Greenlandic individuals who had been part of the so-called “Experiment”<sup>16</sup> in 1951. This apology had continuously been encouraged by Greenlandic politicians. Besides the, to some

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<sup>15</sup> *The Prime Minister's Office*, December 8, 2020. “Undskyldning til de 22 grønlandske børn, som blev sendt til Danmark i 1951”: <https://www.stm.dk/presse/pressemeddelelser/undskyldning-til-de-22-groenlandske-boern-som-blev-sendt-til-danmark-i-1951/>.

<sup>16</sup> The children were sent to Denmark to be assimilated into Danish culture in order to return to Greenland as a Greenlandic elite. Six of the 22 individuals were alive to receive the apology and economic reparations (Jensen et al. 2020; Ministry of Social Affairs and Senior Citizens 2022).

Greenlanders, reconciling effect, the apology also served as an act of Danish nation building through which the Danish government could project Denmark from a shameful into a just and ethical nation (Ahmed 2004). The “good intentions” of the experiment was continuously stressed in the apology in an attempt to preclude any critique. There were no references to the colonization of Greenland even though the experiment predated the official termination of Greenland’s colonial status in 1953. In this way, colonial complicity was again muffled by the economy of love.

During this research, the feeling of shame appeared several times. In the initial research phase, I frequently discussed postcolonialism with Ivalu, an Inuk activist, and one day asked her opinion about my original research idea<sup>17</sup>. She immediately turned it down. She argued that it was a waste of time for Greenlanders to step into a collaboration that was always-already unequal. Arguing that it is the Danes who still cannot comprehend (post)coloniality, she urged me to focus on Danes alone. I felt ashamed for having offended her, embarrassed for losing face and frustrated for feeling misunderstood. Having spent months reflecting on how to go about the Danish-Greenlandic relationship in a relevant and meaningful way, I now felt paralyzed. This emotional overreaction was a manifestation of my white fragility (DiAngelo 2018) which often manifests as shame or anger when white people are confronted with our implications with colonialism, racism, and discrimination. As a white Dane I am not used to having my identity, position and intentions questioned. I belong to the privileged group in the Danish-Greenlandic context who usually analyses and reasons about Greenlandic issues and ways of life (Thisted 2018: 84). Like Ivalu, Julie also questions my allyship and positionality when she during our conversation, while smiling, casually characterized me as “a representative of the colonizer” (Henriksen 2021: 51). Suddenly, “the parental relation” (Gad 2008) is turned on its head, and I am therefore not able to mobilize the shame into something “well-meaning”, as I usually can. Feelings of shame that have not before been associated with my Danish body are now sticking to me.

Naimah Hussain (2018: i) shares a story of similar shameful feelings. As a journalist intern in Greenland, she, in Danish, asks Aqqaluk Lyngé to explain and comment on a report that is “only published in Greenlandic”, as she formulates it. Lyngé repeats her remark. He then replies “we are in Greenland.” Hussain describes how she feels ashamed and sad for

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<sup>17</sup> A collaborative decolonization project between Greenlandic and Danish youth.

communicating inappropriately, but simultaneously offended for being placed in a position of a Dane by a man that does not know her. She argues:

The seemingly small word “only” and a linguistic misunderstanding highlights an issue within the Greenlandic context which is not about me. Or the man [...]. But about historicity and some strong feelings about the relationship between Denmark and Greenland (Hussain 2018: i, author’s translation).

Thisted (2018: 72, author’s translation) argues that whenever Danes and Greenlanders interact there is a line which both parts guard zealously: “in a split second the individual can go from being just oneself to suddenly incarnate ‘the Dane’ or ‘the Greenlander’ with all the baggage that these figures carry.” It is exactly this split second which occurs in mine and Hussain’s encounters with Julie, Ivalu and Aqqaluk respectively. The weight of our colonial “baggage” and our subjective experiences of feeling shame all intersect with ethnicity, class and age and are thus specific. However, the affective economies in both cases work so that Greenlandic people ought to be grateful for the Danish interest, inquiries, support and protection. In the situations explained above, Ivalu and Aqqaluk *refuse* (Tuck & Yang 2014) the love that we Danish subjects attempt to circulate through research inquiries, interest and attention. By refusing this affective transaction they become *affect aliens* (Ahmed 2010): they refuse the normative affective economy in which love and generosity stick to Danish bodies, and shame and gratefulness stick to Greenlandic bodies. A refusal which results in Danish discomfort.

Another incident of Greenlandic refusal occurred when Julie and I discussed colonial complicity:

Julie: You have inherited something that you don’t want to inherit [laughing].

Sofie: Some kind of, I don’t know if it’s shame or guilt. I think that guilt, or the like, that does not help either -

Julie: – you really shouldn’t. Because then you again change the focus to yourself.

Sofie: Yes, exactly, because -

Julie: - because then it’s getting really difficult for us! Because then it becomes even more of a taboo

Sofie: Yes, because -

Julie: - because then we activate the bad consciousness of the Danes, and it is not at all their bad consciousness that this is about. Again, they change focus to themselves.

Sofie: Yes, and -

Julie: - and then it ends with us too, we who call out for more [economic] self-sustainability and sovereignty, start to hold back a bit.

Sofie: I really agree. [...] I also became really frustrated with myself for being frustrated in the first place, and frustrated from not doing anything, and I didn't want to just sit and feel guilty because then we will not go anywhere either. (Henriksen 2021: 46)

Julie states that I have inherited colonial complicity, which is not my fault but nonetheless inherently my responsibility to exercise in a morally responsible way. A statement that continued to linger with me and which I will return to later. However, in the rather excruciating exchange above I desperately try to mobilize my shame into being a “well-meaning individual” (Ahmed 2004) and an ally. Julie, however, continuously refuses this strategy. In the exchange, I agree with Julie's statements about *White guilt* (Katz 2003 [1978]; Tuck & Yang 2012) taking up space in a counterproductive way. This is rather ironic since I am the one to bring up my guilt in the first place. However, it is evident from my “Yes, because” interruptions and my final comment that I have a need for Julie to know that I recognize my own implications in the problem with white guilt. Again, this is a strategy to position myself as an ally in order to, in this context, alleviate my shame. With her refusals, Julie nonetheless defers my allyship. By doing so I am compelled to stay in the discomfort of the learning process, reflecting upon my own colonial complicity and intentions.

### **Colonial complicity**

Hussain and I both enter a (research) context which we know is exhausted by an asymmetrical power relation, and in which our Danish identities carry a colonial “baggage”. This baggage is what Hussain describes as “something in the Greenlandic context”, I describe as coloniality and affective economies and what Else Lidegaard, a Dane living in Greenland in 1953-1961,

describes as “a poison in the blood” in her memoirs<sup>18</sup> (Lidegaard in Thisted 2018: 81–2). Despite this, it is interesting how we perceive ourselves as well-meaning individuals above or outside of the colonial context: Hussain becomes frustrated with Lyngé situating her in “the position of a Dane” and she describes her experience as a “linguistic misunderstanding” that was “not about” her. I feel ashamed by Julie describing me as a “representative of the colonizer”. And in her memoir, Lidegaard describes herself as progressive in opposition to “the bourgeois” Danes who look down at Greenlandic people. We consider colonialism and coloniality as something structural related to the Danish nation exclusively and not to us as individuals. Therefore, we believe that colonial and superior feelings of entitlement, protectionism and exceptionalism stick to us only through our nationality, as Danes, but not as individuals. Ultimately, we think that we can situate ourselves above or outside of the colonial context, as individuals detached from our nationality. We believe that our individual presence in the postcolonial context (Hussain vis-à-vis Aqqaluk, I vis-à-vis Julie and Ivalu, Lidegaard vis-à-vis Makka) can be neutral. Quite ironically, we do not make this distinction with the Greenlanders we speak to. We insist that they are Greenlanders before being individuals:

In fact, the encounter itself is essentially premised on their nationality: Hussain calls Aqqaluk, because he is Greenlandic as well as I speak to Julie, because she is Greenlandic. This again reveals the difficulty with perceiving the postcolonial as something attached to the individual [...] (Henriksen 2021: 52).

Based on my analysis, I argue that Danes consider coloniality as something related to Denmark as a nation, and to the struggles of the affected Other. As something that has already passed (Jensen 2016) or exists somewhere else unrelated to our individuality. In Denmark, there is a cognitive complexity as to who and what constitutes coloniality on an individual level. This can be explained as *colonial aphasia* (Stoler 2011), a term that describes the inability of former colonial powers to link their colonial past with present postcolonial issues. It is reflected in political and affective processes that elicit and elude the acknowledgement of how colonial pasts matter. What Danes seem to miss is that the colonial is also tied to our individuality in the present as privileges and power (Henriksen 2021). As an example, I and Hussain are the ones inquiring, reasoning about, and analyzing the Danish-Greenlandic context and we have

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<sup>18</sup> Lidegaard (2016). “Med nordlys i øjnene – Genskin fra et liv med Grønland som ballast” [“With Northern lights in the eyes - Reflections from a life with Greenland as ballast”]. The memoir includes a correspondence between Lidegaard herself and Makka Kleist, director of The National Theatre of Greenland.

the privilege to communicate with Greenlandic people in Danish<sup>19</sup>. By continuously describing me as a “representative of the colonizer” Julie is reminding me that I cannot simply escape my colonial complicity by being a “well-meaning” individual. Ultimately, it is Julie’s deferral of my allyship that leads me to work reflexively and autoethnographically with my increased awareness of my colonial complicity.

Individual Danes realizing their colonial complicity is a crucial step towards readjusting the Danish-Greenlandic relationship into a less asymmetrical and unequal one. Coloniality continues to shape the Danish-Greenlandic relationship and it manifests as discrimination, racism, asymmetrical power relations and colonial aphasia. As examples, the Danish derogative term “drunk as a Greenlander”<sup>20</sup> was enshrined into *The Danish Dictionary*<sup>21</sup> as late as in 2017, and recently Danes were infuriated when a Danish ice cream company changed the name of their ice cream “Giant Eskimo” in a response to critical requests from Greenlandic people (Lyng 2010; Graugaard 2020a). Many Danes argued that the name ought to be kept for nostalgic reasons, overtly ignoring that it is derogative, racist, and dehumanizing to Inuit. Another example is that many Danes living in Greenland are part of a political and/or cultural elite and that racist behavior is not uncommon in these circles<sup>22</sup>. Realizing our colonial legacy and our participation in affective economies rooted in colonialism is the first step of a reparative trajectory. It is difficult to hold current and future generations of Danes accountable for the colonialism that took place before our time. However, since coloniality transcends colonialism we continuously benefit from our colonial legacy and thus have the moral responsibility to work against it<sup>23</sup>.

### **Reflexivity and researcher positionality: researchers as allies or accomplices?**

Because Danish research in Greenlandic contexts essentially has colonial implications, and because I too am part of that field, I find it important to discuss the ambiguous role of Danish

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<sup>19</sup> For research discussing power relations and language use in Greenland, see Kleemann-Andersen, C. (2020). *Plastic Flowers and Tongue-less Greenlanders - Feelings in the Language Debate in 2009-2019*. Iisimatusearfik - University of Greenland

<sup>20</sup> In Danish “Grønlænderstiv”.

<sup>21</sup> *Arctic Today*, November 20, 2017: <https://www.arctictoday.com/an-update-to-the-official-danish-dictionary-raises-objections-from-greenlanders/>.

<sup>22</sup> *Information*, November 3, 2021: <https://www.information.dk/debat/2021/11/danskere-opfoerer-racistisk-groenland-omfang-overraske-fleste>.

<sup>23</sup> Iris Marion Young (2006) argues for a “social connection model of responsibility” in which accountability of past wrongdoings is linked to the responsibility of the majority population who benefits from unequal structures.

researchers as accomplices, allies, or something in between. As Graugaard (2020) points out, having a reflexive approach and using autoethnography cannot stand alone as a remedy against unequal and colonial research relations. It did, however, have a transformative and restorative impact on this particular research process:

Sofie: I really think that what just happened in our conversation – a lot of things are happening with me right now [mentally, through the conversation], and it's all a part of a process.

Julie: But I also have to tell you that, for example, this approach that you have – that is not my generation's approach. I have never met anyone who had the approach that you have.

Sofie: What is that approach?

Julie: That is, how can I say it, on giving me the premise to be allowed to take up space [...] You don't come to me as a White and ask as a White, or, you do, but you are aware of it. [...] And the curious thing is that in this context you are also honest and situate yourself as the representative of the colonizer's descendants [...] And I think that this is what actually characterizes your generation and the younger ones. A different approach. That you are aware of this [...], you verbalize it and have concepts about it. I haven't seen it before. I think there is a new tendency on the way, which means that I can be a lot more open. We can both be humans in front of each other, but we know that we are also culture bearers. And not only that, but our ethnicity carries historicity and affiliations and complexities, and I think it is becoming easier to walk into these discussions, especially with younger people– students, academics. (Henriksen 2021: 53)

Julie points to the affective economies when she describes how we are humans but also culture bearers whose “ethnicity carries historicity”. Based on Julie's statement, reflexivity is rarely an integral part of scholarly work on, in and about Greenland but merely an asterisk in a project description. Reflexivity was formative of this entire research process and determined the research topic. Articulating researcher positionality and coloniality created a space in which Julie could test research-researcher positions and power balances. As examples, she said “I sit here and look at you, right, and when I do, I know where you are located. Again, who does one

talk to?”. She also challenged me to go to Greenland and “see what that does” to me as a Dane (Henriksen 2021: 52+38).

Reflexivity is no remedy to 300-year-old colonial relations. Doing critical and decolonial work as “a representative of the colonizer” can therefore feel as or might merely be *moves to innocence*, which are

attempt[s] to relieve the settler [or colonizer] of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all. In fact, settler scholars may gain professional kudos or a boost in their reputations for being so sensitive or self-aware (Tuck and Yang 2012: 10).

My implication in especially the latter sentence is obvious. No matter how much postcolonial or critical scholars describe, analyze and problematize unequal power relations and coloniality we are inherently still part of the problem. This raises the question of where claims of undoing colonial harm end and moves to innocence begin. These unsettling research relations are strikingly similar to that of the general relationship between Denmark and Greenland. Regarding Danish geopolitics, Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen<sup>24</sup>, lecturer in Arctic Politics at the Danish Defense Academy, argues that by recognizing Greenland’s right to independence, Denmark will be perceived as a sympathetic, rather than a colonial, nation. However, if Greenland gains independence, Denmark loses considerable geopolitical influence. It is best therefore for Denmark and Danes to be positioned in postcolonial procrastination (Jensen 2020: 142): working towards Greenland’s independence but never arriving there.

## Conclusion

Any Danish-Greenlandic context is permeated by emotions rooted in colonialism and its accompanying asymmetrical relations. Therefore, no current (geo)political, economic, or cultural discussion about the past, current and future relationship between Denmark and Greenland can be fully grasped without an affective perspective. Through an economy of love Danes have developed a demand for Greenlandic gratitude and loyalty in return for love and protection. When Greenlandic subjects refuse the economy of love they are often met with Danish anger or shame disguised as geopolitical strategies and protective arguments. Examples

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<sup>24</sup> *Weekendavisen*, July 23, 2020: <https://www.weekendavisen.dk/2020-30/samfund/giv-slip-for-at-bevare>, author’s translation.



of Greenlandic refusals are illustrated in this article as geopolitical negotiations with other nation states and rejections of research inquiries among others. The economy of love can be used as an affective, national strategy to elude colonial complicity, consequently perpetuating colonial aphasia. By employing autoethnography I have shown how love, shame and protectiveness are circulated, as well as negotiated and navigated, by the individual Dane. Doing so illustrates how Danes do not live as passive agents under our colonial legacy but are active in circulating colonial emotions – sometimes even when we think we are dismantling those. This not only emphasizes that we have colonial complicity but that we have the individual agency to stop perpetuating coloniality as well. Realizing this is important if we are to take radical steps towards a restorative trajectory of the Danish-Greenlandic relationship. By turning the gaze onto myself and my research process, I have sought to scrutinize my own colonial complicity as specifically a Danish researcher. This is my response to the politics and power of knowledge production, as well as a demonstration of how the realization of complicity can look for the individual. A reflexive approach will not resolve epistemic violence nor coloniality alone, but I argue that it is time for Danes, and specifically Danish researchers, to ask ourselves the uncomfortable questions about positionality, privilege, and relevance, and to act accordingly. If not, we contribute to the status quo – we procrastinate in the postcolonial which ultimately equals endorsing the very colonial structures that we are condemning.

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